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ABSTRACT

The Academic Game, considered a valuable exercise for academics and administrators in investigating some of the problems of decision-making and possible ways of facilitating organizational decisions, is described. The major objective of the game is to achieve on agreed promotion policy. The roles and organization structure are designed to ensure that the achievement of the major objectives is obstructed by structural impediments and conflicting interests. Observers can be assigned to study the players' behavior in the simulation as it develops, and their views are considered important in the debriefing discussion that follows the completion of the simulations. (Author/SPG)

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HE 010 314

THE ACADEMIC GAME

A simulation of policy-making in a University
for 8 to 20 players

Prepared by David Jaques for the Programme for
Staff Development in Universities

THE ACADEMIC GAME

A simulation has its own reality but this is not the reality it is set up to simulate. The reality of the Academic Game is the simplified organisation structure of a university. It is simplified inasmuch as there is only one department, no registrars, no AUT chairmen and the students are not performing what many still regard as their primary purpose at university: studying. All of these elements could be introduced without altering the basic scheme of the simulation but it would thereby become more complex and lengthy.

In the Academic Game the major objective of the players will be to achieve an agreed promotions policy. The Vice-Chancellor's instructions in his Envelope II (page 6) set the simulation rolling in this direction. The roles and organisation structure have been designed so as to ensure that the achievement of the major objectives is obstructed by structural impediments and conflicting interests. Whether or not this reflects a typical university situation might prove a worthwhile topic of discussion.

Observers can be assigned to study the players' behaviour in the simulation as it develops, and their views are of vital importance in the de-briefing discussion which follows the completion of the simulation. The game itself should take about 2½ to 3 hours to complete.

Objectives of the Simulation

By the end of the session, it is anticipated that the participants will have

1. Gained some understanding of the problems of communications in an academic organisation.

2. Gained insight into some of the barriers to new ideas and change in an educational institution.

3. Gained understanding of the possible value of simulations as a means of studying organisational problems.

4. Gained awareness of the priorities and perspectives of different interest groups within an academic organisation and the ways in which their goals may conflict with institutional goals.

The Academic Game could be a valuable exercise for any group of academics and administrators in investigating some of the problems of making, and possible ways of facilitating, organisational decisions. It is obviously important that participants should have personal experience of at least some of the roles prescribed and it is probably as well that they should not be meeting for the first time during the Game.

The Academic Game was run twice on the SDU programme in 1974, and twice on the Management Teacher Development Programme at the Polytechnic of Central London, and although apparently successful on 3 out of the 4 occasions it has been modified to accommodate snags and criticisms

encountered. The basic structure of the Game could be used as a framework for other problem areas inside or outside education. Some possible variations are suggested on p.(vi). The Game is presented here almost exactly as it was used at the last SDU meeting. However, for the future, I propose simplifying the role sketches on pp. 3 and 4 into mere biographies and leave participants to determine attitudes of their own making.

I am indebted to John Rae of the School of Environmental Studies, University College London, for the basic structure of the Academic Game.

DJ

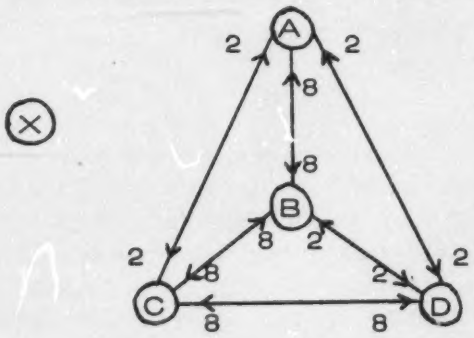
SUPERVISOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

(i) Preparation

The players of this simulation are to be divided into 4 spatially separated groups.

A - Vice-Chancellor	Not less than 1
B - Head of Department	Not less than 1
C - Lecturers	Not less than 3 (1 woman, at least)
D - Students	Not less than 3

Tables should be set out, one for each group, and in a room large enough to make eavesdropping between groups difficult, as follows:



The arrows and figures indicate the directions and numbers of messages respectively which may be sent during the formal simulation

Table X represents Control through whom all messages must pass.

Tables are allocated:

(a) instruction sheets in ENVELOPES II
(b) communication cards as follows:

A: 8 blue cards labelled A ⟶ B and numbered 1 to 8
2 " " " A ⟶ C " " 1 and 2
2 " " " A ⟶ D " " 1 and 2

3 white cards labelled "Notice of Meeting"
7≠ " " " "Invitation"

B: 8 green cards labelled B ⟶ A and numbered 1 to 8
8 " " " B ⟶ C " " 1 to 8
2 " " " B ⟶ D " " 1 and 2

5 white cards labelled "Notice of Meeting"
5 " " " "Invitation"

C: 8 yellow cards labelled C ⟶ D and numbered 1 to 8
8 " " " C ⟶ B " " 1 to 8
2 " " " C ⟶ A " " 1 and 2
3* white cards labelled "Tutorial"
1 " " " "Notice of meeting"

*According to number of students ≠ According to number of people on tables B, C & D.

(iv) SUPERVISOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

D: 8 pink cards labelled D→C and numbered 1 to 8
2 " " " D→B " " 1 and 2
2 " " " D→A " " 1 and 2

3* white cards labelled "Tutorial"

*According to number of students

The labelling is suggested in order that the game can be reconstructed afterwards.

It would be an advantage for both Vice-Chancellor and Head of Department to have Administrative Assistants working with them.

Extra members may act as observers. An observer's checklist is attached. The Supervisor may act as Control or delegate the job to someone else as he/she chooses.

(ii) Procedure

The general information sheet is given out to all concerned well in advance of the Session. At the start of the session roles are negotiated between supervisor and participants, some care being exercised in the choice of lecturers. Each participant is given his or her appropriate ENVELOPE I and asked to open and study the contents privately. This done, they may spend 5 minutes introducing themselves to each other in a general get-together.

Participants are then directed to their respective tables and instructed to open ENVELOPE II. They have 5 minutes for discussion, planning and electing within their groups before the game proper begins. The schedule of designated meetings (p.vi) should be displayed.

You should indicate and keep a watching brief over:

(a) the beginning of the simulation proper; hereafter inter-group communication is either by means of messages on cards sent via you or nominee acting as Control, or at meetings.

(b) the beginning and end of all designated meetings (see p.vi).

(c) the beginning and end of all informal meetings which may be arranged at any time convenient to the participants concerned. Details of these meetings are contained in ENVELOPES II.

Control should use his own judgement as to whether he should stop meetings strictly on their time limit.

The function of Control in this simulation is:

(a) to check that participants are 'playing the game'

(b) to decide on the acceptability of any variations in the rules

(c) to provide (and invent!) any extra background information that is asked for.

The simulation ends when the Vice-Chancellor has produced a proposal for a promotions procedure which is acceptable to you in respect of:

(a) covering all aspects of a lecturer's duties;

(b) having achieved general support in the University.

(iii) De-Briefing

The final part of the activity, and the most important in educational terms, is the de-briefing discussion. A thorough de-briefing should take at least two hours. A more cursory one, perhaps only half an hour.

Some of the main purposes of de-briefing are:

(a) to review the simulation - this would include the piecing together of alternative perceptions of various individuals and groups, consideration of strategies other than those adopted, etc.

(b) ascertaining the extent to which it replicated a real-life situation.

(c) discussing what objectives were achieved, especially unpredicted ones.

(d) evaluating the simulation.

If the review of the simulation is to be systematic (and this may require two hours) then it may be necessary to structure the discussions fairly carefully. For instance, cards could be returned to the groups whence they originated and the observers allowed to join the discrete groups they were studying for critical evaluation of their interpretations, decisions and strategies during the simulation. Each group could ask the observers first to make brief comments on their individual and collective behaviour. They could then attempt to reconstruct their part in the simulation, spiced with comments from the observers. One of each group would be asked to write the evaluation report. The review would then be completed by drawing everyone together in a plenary session (though perhaps still in discrete groups) to hear and comment upon the reports. In order to reduce time here it might be advisable for one report only to be read, but interrupted with comments by other groups. Two observers might be designated as 'conflict spotters'.

A review session of this nature will probably last over an hour, and activities will have to be scheduled to a fairly strict timetable. A less systematic but briefer form of review session would be for the supervisor to attempt to retrace the action by eliciting comments from participants and observers. Questions such as 'How did this come about?', 'Did you see it the same way?' and 'Would you have done it differently on reflection?' should generate sufficient commotion in the ranks.

The review activity over, it may be valuable to find out to what extent people thought the Academic Game simulated a real-life situation and whether it offered them any illumination of issues and problems in academic policy-writing.

(vi) SUPERVISOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

Now would be the time to discover what everyone learned from the simulation and then to compare their thoughts with the stated objectives on page (i). (It is important not to bias the responses by revealing the objectives before their ideas have been aired.)

Finally, as ideally one should in any educational activity, all involved should be asked for evaluative comments and for suggestions on how the Academic Game might be improved.

(iv) Schedule of Designated Meetings (to be displayed at start of simulation)

Hour Minutes		Duration (mins.)
0.00	Simulation starts	
0.15	Staff Meeting	5
0.30	SSL Meeting	5
0.60	Tea in SCR (only if real world dictates)	20
1.20	Staff Meeting	5
1.35	SSL Meeting	5
2.15	Senate	15

NB The coffee break described in Envelopes II is an optional extra if the above tea break is not held. It is called at Control's discretion.

(v) Variations

An alternative way of operating the simulation might be not to specify initially the form of the organisational structure in the University, to have a working party elected from the participants set one up, and then operate the simulation for a time on this basis. Another working party, elected from the observers, could then revise the structure and the simulation could finally be operated for a further period under the new schema. Other more minor variations can be introduced by 'Control' as the simulation proceeds.

Although designed for use in any institution of higher education, the Academic Game uses titles more appropriate to universities than polytechnics. It is probably a good idea to change these titles if the simulation is run with polytechnic participants.

It is possible that among extra details Control will have to supply as the simulation proceeds are:

minutes of previous meetings;
composition of appointments and promotions board;
when the exams, if any, are to be taken;
who is whose tutor.

It is equally possible that none of these requests and a host others will be made. Lest Control be the first participant to retire with nervous exhaustion, an assistant and a handy photo-copying machine are recommended.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND RULES

Northchester University was founded in 1870. Located in a large industrial city it has established a high academic reputation particularly in Physical Sciences, Humanities and Education. The previous Vice-Chancellor who retired six months ago took pride in the low turnover of staff and very much regarded it as 'his university'. The new Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Evans, comes straight from a chair in Political Science at one of the new universities. There are 5,000 students, 600 teaching staff and 25 departments.

The participants in this simulation will be:

At Table A	Vice-Chancellor
At Table B	Head of Department
At Table C	3 Lecturers
At Table D	3 or more students, including the Union President

The body with the authority for policy-making is the Senate which in this simulation consists of:

Vice-Chancellor
Head of Department
President of Students' Union
1 Lecturer
1 Student

At department level there are newly instituted Staff-Student Liaison Committees consisting of:

Head of Department
1 Lecturer
1 Student

Their role is an advisory one.

There is only one department in this simulation.

Any further information may be obtained from the Supervisor beforehand or from Control during the simulation.

Current issues are:

(a) both staff and students are separately concerned about the lack of amenities on campus;

(b) students want more say on educational matters;

(c) a senior lectureship has just become vacant in the department concerned in this simulation;

(d) the department in question has been under-subscribed with students over the past two sessions.

You will first be given an envelope in which you will find a description of your role in this simulation.

When you have been given and have read the contents of this envelope you are to mix freely with other participants in your role; you must collectively decide upon the discipline of your department which should be reported to the supervisor.

Following this, you will be assigned in groups to Table A, B, C and D as appropriate. You are then to open the second envelope which you will find on your table.

This envelope contains instructions for the procedure of the next part of the proceedings, the formal simulation.

You will have 5 minutes in which to read the contents of the envelope and discuss strategies, etc., within your group.

In the formal simulation which ensues, inter-group communications take place in the following way. Each table is provided with a number of coloured cards labelled (e.g. A⟶D), to indicate the writer and addressee of a communication, and numbered to indicate the sequence in which they should be sent. Messages may be written only on these cards, one message per card, and when all the cards have been used by a group it can send no more messages. When a message has been written it may then be delivered by one player from the writing group to the Control who will pass it on to the appropriate group. Cards may not be re-used.

There will also be opportunities for oral communication at various meetings which may be called. There are two types of meeting:

(a) designated meetings, which take place at the times listed on the schedule (made available when you are at your specified table);

(b) informal meetings, which can take place at any time that participants are free to meet, but are limited in number.

Fuller details of these meetings will be given in your second envelope.

ENVELOPE I VICE-CHANCELLOR DR EVANS

You are very keen to establish this University as one which takes a 'liberal' line on educational matters. You have been here only 6 months and are therefore still feeling your way to an extent in your relationships within the power structure of the University. You are ex-officio chairman of the Senate which you alone may convene. You may also organise a sherry party, once the simulation has started, to which all participants are invited. The choice of timing is yours.

You are likely to meet the Head of the ------ Department, Professor Deutsch.

ENVELOPE I HEAD OF DEPARTMENT PROFESSOR DEUTSCH

You have held this position for the past ten years. You regret that the administrative load of your job allows you to do little undergraduate teaching, but you do make a point of lecturing on your highly esteemed Masters' course and you still write papers for publication.

There are 3 lecturers in your department:

Dr. Geoffrey Bates	- a respected academic of some research standing
Mr. Michael Wosby	- a steady man who has spent 10 years in industry
*Ms Sheila (Mr. John) Freedman	- a bright young woman (man) who in the short time she (he) has been here has taken the students' side on more than one issue.

* Sheila or John according to whether a woman or a man is playing the role.

ENVELOPE I

LECTURER 1 DR GEOFFREY BATES

You are the most highly qualified academic in the department and have become known nationally in a narrow specialist subject area by your contributions to eminent journals in that field. Secretly you find students a bit of a hindrance to your pursuit of research and you hate politicking of committees. Your colleague, Mike Wosby, is a steady man who has come from industry. Sheila* (John) Freedman is young and new.

You regard your Head of Department, Professor Deutsch, as an efficient and highly respected man.

*Sheila or John according to whether a man or a woman is playing the role.

ENVELOPE I

LECTURER 2 MICHAEL WOSBY

You are a mature family man, competent at your job having only recently joined the staff after 10 years in industry. You are on the committee of the Staff Club and have started a male voice choir in the University. You have an equal distrust of administrators and student radicals but can usually be relied on to steer a consensus path. You like talking about your time in industry.

Geoffrey Bates and Sheila*(John) Freedman, your two colleagues are respectively a research-oriented academic of some standing and a bright young woman (man) with fairly radical ideas.

Your Head of Department, Professor Deutsch, appears to be a typical but competent organisation man.

*Sheila or John according to whether a man or a woman is playing the role.

ENVELOPE I

LECTURER 3 SHEILA (JOHN)*FREEDMAN

Having completed a Master's Degree at the University of Wittenberg where you contributed to several radical tracts on student causes, you joined the staff at Northchester only last September.

Your colleagues are Geoffrey Bates, a hard-line academic and Michael Wosby, a rather boring man who harks back to his long years in industry at the drop of a hat.

Professor Deutsch, Head of Department, seems to you to be more an administrator than an academic and to have little interest in or contact with students.

* Sheila or John according to whether a woman or a man is playing the role.

ENVELOPE I ALL THREE STUDENTS (3 copies)

You are to keep your own personality but in the role of a student.

You are all concerned with the following issues:

1 The poor standard of teaching in the University which you believe results from:

(a) the prestige accruing from research and/or publications

(b) the lack of any teacher-training for lecturers.

In your department most of the teaching is formal and there is little staff/student contact with the notable exception of Sheila (John)* Freedman. In fact, Dr. Bates, the most senior of the lecturers, seems to regard students as an unwelcome intrusion. You understand your Head of Department teaches only on postgraduate courses.

2 Overcrowded Union facilities.

* Sheila or John according to whether a woman or a man is playing the role.

TABLE A

ENVELOPE II Talk only within your group except as designated below.

You have just returned from a meeting of the UGC where you were happy to agree that Northchester should be the first to attempt the setting up of a rational promotions policy for academic staff. The policy should include consideration of all aspects of a lecturer's duties and achieve the general agreement of all concerned. You have also learned that two floors of an existing building in the University are to be released for general use within the next year. You have 5 minutes in which to devise a strategy for achieving an agreed promotions policy. The formal game will then commence. Thereafter you may communicate only as follows:

Cards

8 cards to Head of Department	(A ⟶ B)
2 cards to Lecturers	(A ⟶ C)
2 cards to Students	(A ⟶ D)

Informal Meetings

4 meetings lasting 5 minutes each between you and Head of Department, 2 called by you and 2 by him, both meetings at your table.

2 meetings lasting 5 minutes between you and the President of the Union, one called by you and the other by him, both meetings at your table.

1 coffee break of 5 minutes in the SCR (called by Control).
1 sherry party called by you and lasting no more than 10 minutes.

Invitations for informal meetings should be sent out on white cards.

Designated Meetings

1 meeting of the Senate lasting no more than 15 minutes.

You are advised to send out an agenda for this meeting on a white card 5 minutes in advance of its scheduled start.

The simulation will finish when you have achieved a promotions policy which is satisfactory to Control acting the role of the UGC.

TABLE B

ENVELOPE II PROFESSOR DEUTSCH

You should not communicate with other tables except within the rules prescribed below.

You have 5 minutes in which to:

(a) read your instructions;

(b) think about your intentions for both the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and the Staff Meeting which you will chair. Both lecturers and students are electing one representative each to the former.

After 5 minutes the formal simulation will start whereafter you may communicate only as follows:

Cards

8 cards to the Vice-Chancellor	(B⟶A)
8 cards to the Lecturers	(B⟶C)
2 cards to the Students	(B⟶D)

Designated Meetings

2 meetings of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee held at your table. Each is to last no more than 5 minutes.
2 Staff Meetings lasting no more than 5 minutes each.

You are advised to send out agendas for these meetings on the white cards.

1 meeting of the Senate

Informal Meetings

4 meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, two called by you and two by him, and each lasting no more than 5 minutes.

2 individual meetings with each of the lecturers lasting no more than 5 minutes each; one of each called by you and one by them.

Any informal gathering called by the Vice-Chancellor.

Coffee break of 5 minutes in SCR (called by Control).

Invitations to informal meetings should be sent out on the white cards.

You are to stay within your role until the simulation is over.

TABLE C

ENVELOPE II LECTURERS (3 copies)

Talk only within your group except as instructed below.

You are all concerned at the poor communal facilities for staff on campus. A Senior Lectureship has just become vacant in the department.

You have 5 minutes in which to:

(a) read your roles and instructions;

(b) elect a representative for the Staff-Student Liaison Committee;

(c) Elect a representative for the Senate.

After 5 minutes the formal simulation will start, after which, with the exception of discussion in your group, you may communicate only as follows:

8 cards to Head of Department	(C ⟶ B)
8 cards to Students	(C ⟶ D)
2 cards to the Vice-Chancellor	(C ⟶ A)

Designated Meetings

2 meetings, lasting no more than 5 minutes, of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. The meetings will be held in the Head of Department's office. (One staff representative.)

2 Staff Meetings lasting no more than 5 minutes each.

1 meeting of the Senate (one staff representative).

Informal Meetings

Coffee break in SCR lasting no more than 5 minutes (called by Control).

2 one-to-one meetings with Head of Department, one to be called by you and one by him.

2 tutorials of no more than 5 minutes, one called by you and one by your tutee.

Any informal gathering organised by the Vice-Chancellor.

Invitations to informal meetings should be sent out on the white cards.

You are to stay within your roles until the simulation is over.

TABLE D

ENVELOPE II STUDENTS (3 or more copies)

Talk only within your own group except as designated below.

You have 5 minutes in which to:

(a) read these instructions;

(b) decide which of you is to be President of the Union;

(c) elect: one representative to the Staff-Student Liaison Committee
one representative to the Senate (the President is automatically a member of the latter);

(d) discuss your policy in respect of the issues mentioned in Envelope 1.

At 5 minutes the formal simulation will start. Thereafter you may communicate with the other groups only as follows:

Cards

8 cards to Lecturers	(D⟶C)
2 cards to Head of Department	(D⟶B)
2 cards to Vice-Chancellor	(D⟶A)

Informal Meetings

2 meetings lasting 5 minutes between President and Vice-Chancellor, one at the bidding of the former and one at the bidding of the latter. Both meetings will be in the Vice-Chancellor's office.

Any informal gathering organised by the Vice-Chancellor.

Coffee break in the SCR (called by Control).

2 tutorials, of no more than 5 minutes duration each, one initiated by you and one by your tutor.

Invitations for informal meetings should be sent on the white cards.

Designated Meetings

2 meetings of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee which includes 1 lecturer, Head of Department, and is held in the latter's office (one student representative).

1 meeting of the Senate (President and one student representative).

You are to stay within your roles until the simulation is over.

Your tutor is .....

OBSERVERS' CHECKLIST

N.B. Observers must at no point take part in the proceedings.

If you are an individual observer you should 'shadow' the participant you have chosen to observe.

If you are a group observer you should stay with the group you have chosen to observe.

Your star will be in the ascendant after the simulation when the de-briefing session begins.

The checklist is intended merely to alert you to possible points to observe.

A. Checklist for Individual Observers

1. Did he/she listen to points made by other participants?
2. Did he/she constantly reiterate his/her own point of view?
3. Was he/she trying to establish areas of agreement?
4. How did he/she present his/her arguments? e.g. in a one-sided way, hearing others before putting his/her own views.
5. Was he/she aware of the reaction to his/her own contributions for other members?
6. Did he/she bring irrelevant issues into the discussions?
7. Did he/she allow him/herself to be drawn into underlying tensions?
8. Did he/she try to bring other members of the group into discussions?
9. Did he/she suggest his/her own ideas or build on those of others?

OBSERVERS' CHECKLIST

N.B. Observers must at no point take part in the proceedings.

If you are an individual observer you should 'shadow' the participant you have chosen to observe.

If you are a group observer you should stay with the group you have chosen to observe.

Your star will be in the ascendant after the simulation when the de-briefing session begins.

The checklist is intended merely to alert you to possible points to observe.

B. Checklist for Group Observers

1. Did the group clarify its objectives?
2. Did the group agree on a strategy and did it then stick to it rigidly?
3. Did the group work cohesively; was everyone involved and positive about its decisions?
4. Were decisions arrived at mainly by consensus?
5. Was the group always clear about what had been decided?
6. Was conflict brought out into the open and dealt with?
7. What was the effect of conflict?
8. What factors influenced decisions, e.g. rational arguments
   emotional appeals
   weight of authority
   desire to avoid dissension
9. Were irrelevant issues brought into discussions?
10. Did the leadership of the group move around to the person best suited to lead it for any specific purpose?
11. Did the group take regard of time?
12. Did the group evaluate itself and its way of working during the Game?